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The gift of the Author

A
S E R M O N

PREACHED AT

HEMMINGFORD ABBOTS,

AND

HEMMINGFORD GRAY,

HUNTINGDONSHIRE;

ON

Friday, February 11, 1757:

Being the Day appointed for

A GENERAL FAST.

J. Shyn

By CHARLES DICKENS, LL.B.

CAMBRIDGE;

Printed by J. BENTHAM Printer to the UNIVERSITY;
For W. THURLBOURN and J. WOODYER in Cambridge; and
sold by J. BEECROFT in Pater-noster Row, London.

M.DCC.LVII.

S E R M O N

HEMMINGFORD ABBEY

HEMMINGFORD GRAY

HUNTINGDONSHIRE

Friday, Feb. 11, 1757.



A GEL

D. CHARLES DICKENS, R.S.

Printed by J. Woodcock, at the 'Black Swan' in the Strand, London.

1857

T O
MY WORTHY PATRON,
Sir *JOHN BERNARD*, Bart.

THIS DISCOURSE
IS
MOST HUMBLY INSCRIBED,

With all Gratitude,

By His

Obliged,

Obedient,

and very humble Servant,

CHARLES DICKENS.

TO

MY WORTHY PATRON
ST JOHN BERNARD, Barr.

THIS DISCOURSE

MOST HUMILY INSCRIBED,



A
SERMON, &c.

JOEL ii. 12, 13.

Therefore also now, saith the Lord, turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning: And rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God; for he is gracious, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil.

IN the chapter, from whence the text is taken, you will find the prophet *Joel* shewing unto *Sion* the terribleness of God's judgements; that he exhorteth to repentance, prescribeth a Fast, and promiseth a blessing.

But tho' the precise time of his prophecies be uncertain; tho' chronologers may be at a
loss

loss to fix them; these are points of no moment to you: what God foretold by his prophet would undoubtedly come to pass; they contain at all times an useful lesson; tho' we may not be interested in the event, we most certainly are in the moral of them. Thus, the words before us are a proper and pathetic enforcement of the great and necessary duty of Repentance; they exhort you to *turn unto the Lord your God, with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, with mourning*; assuring you, *that he is gracious, merciful, slow to anger, of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil.*

Considering therefore that the measure of our iniquities is full, every sort of wickedness daily encreasing; when we have already felt the smart of national calamities, and the Divine anger still seemeth to threaten us; ought we not to give good heed to the admonition of the prophet? If we have any regard for ourselves, any love for our Country, let these motives lead us to a sincere Repentance; Assembled as we are, to deprecate God's
 wrath

wrath against us, to lament our past follies, and extravagances, vain thoughts, idle words, and unseemly wicked actions: if we would have our petitions answered, our desires satisfied; they must be real, earnest, sincere; otherwise our portion will be with hypocrites, and our prayers turned into sin. For though it be true, in general, that all affectation of external gravity of deportment; of a rigid austerity of behaviour; that solemnity of Repentance; are but the outward shew, the mere form of godliness, of no good use, or profit, unattended with an inner change of mind: Yet there certainly are such circumstances, or occasions, where this duty *must* pass beyond the heart, and the closet; where the humiliation will become imperfect, if it be not as *publickly* set forth before all men, as it is in *private*, or should be, sincerely performed in the sight of God. But if there are such circumstances, — surely, the solemnity of *this Day*, both with regard to the importance of the conjuncture, and the critical situation of things at present,

sent, is one of these occasions: This is plainly the sense of the Nation by thus calling us together.

To the end therefore, that you may all perform the duty of this day aright, to the glory of God, and for the good of your own souls; I must entreat you to give me your attention a little longer: — Though the publick marks of sorrow and humiliation should appear in a publick repentance, yet we are by no means to stop there; these appearances should not be too soon cast off; they should produce lasting impressions; the outward sign, become an *inward spiritual grace*; and shew its influence on your future lives, and conversations; still *pressing forward towards the prize of the high calling of God, in Christ Jesus*; for *if we faint, we shall not reap*.

This is the only way, to make these seasons turn to our true advantage; to make the Prophet's blessing become our portion; since if this is done, he assureth us, *that the Lord will be jealous for his land, and pity his people*:

ple: For let our sorrow for sin be ever so sincere, our resolutions thereupon ever so firm; yet if instead of making good these holy purposes, these pious resolutions, we fail to produce *works meet for repentance*, it will still be incomplete; and *an house of this building falleth*.

If therefore we would have this work of piety not prove in vain; if we would have our Fast such *as the Lord hath chosen*, wherein he hath promised to *hear from heaven, and, when he heareth, to forgive*; we should not only comply with the outward ceremonies of repentance, but resolve to bring forth the inward *fruits of his holy spirit*; and not only resolve, but really perform it. When we address ourselves to him for pardon, we should also take heed to dispose our hearts in such a manner, that we may have fit dispositions to receive it; otherwise, our prayers will not be heard, nor our petitions answered: But if we thus improve this Day's Solemnity, we shall not fail to meet with a favourable acceptance at the throne of grace,

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from that God, who is deservedly styled in the Text, *gracious, merciful, and slow to anger.*

Such a repentance as this, hath many motives to encourage us to it; if we consider the mercy, the goodness of God to sinners, his unwillingness to pronounce any judgements upon them, if they will repent, or turn unto him: When we consider this, can any of us be backward in performing this Duty? The Scriptures are remarkably express, and full, in declaring this great truth, in assuring us of his acceptance of repenting sinners: *When the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness that he hath committed, and doth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive: If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* What more forceable encouragement therefore can any of us desire, than the express promises of God to forgive us, upon our return; to assist us with his Grace, and holy Spirit?

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It were endless to tell you the manifold ways, the wonderful methods of God's providence, to convince us of his mercy, his loving-kindness to us; sometimes declaring his readiness to pardon; at others, expostulating with our obstinacy: *Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.*

If he exhorteth to repentance, it is upon a promise of forgiveness; if he threateneth judgements, it is with a reserve of mercy; upon our belief, fear, and turning unto him, *He repenteth of the evil; He will not do it.*

These indeed, and such like, are arguments only to your reason and conscience; they therefore carry with them, perhaps, less force or conviction: Upon which account, I shall now endeavour to speak to your sense, and experience; to shew — not indeed from the Israelites in *Canaan*, or the Jews in *Palestine*; but from instances nearer

to our own breasts ; from our own times, and in our own country ; the mercy, the goodness of God, his providence, his loving kindness to us.

Thus to begin with ourselves — notwithstanding we have all of us, more than once, abused his goodness, yet he still continues to stretch out the arms of his mercy, would be reconciled unto us, if we would now, in this our day, consider *the things that belong to our peace.*

That he hath delivered this country from danger, in which, but for his providence over it, the people of *England* must long since have perished, or have been given up an easy prey to their enemies round about them: That he hath often smitten us too in mercy, not in judgement; to correct and admonish, not to ruin or destroy; and upon our deprecating of his anger, hath heard, and answered our petitions: — To shew this, we need only consult the History of the present Age, and that which immediately preceded it; In those, the instances,
which

which we ourselves have seen, or our Fathers have told us, will never probably be forgotten by us.

The people of ~~this~~ land have long tasted how gracious the Lord is; how unwilling to make a total end of them; how *his mercy endureth for ever*: The dispensations of his providence in this Island have been truly wonderful, in protecting and supporting the FREEDOM, LAWS, and RELIGION of our Country.

Thus it appeareth in our History, that it pleased the ALMIGHTY, in his indignation at our vices and impieties, to let loose amongst us the rage of *civil discord*; to bid the *Sword go through the land*; and to deprive the PEOPLE of their lawful SOVEREIGN, who were insensible of the blessings of his mild and merciful disposition, his wisdom and piety: It pleased the ALMIGHTY, to bereave the PRINCE of his crown and life, for encroaching too far upon the liberties of the PEOPLE; and to involve the nation in anarchy and confusion.

But

But after God had thus proved and visited us, for a long continuance; with what a miracle was he seen afterwards, to turn again the calamities of SION, and restore to it the blessing of Peace!

When we had forgot these wonders which he had wrought for us, as the Israelites of old had done; and still went on to corrupt our ways before him; when in a few years after, we became ripe for more signal Severities; — the DESTROYING ANGEL went forth, and *slew thousands and ten thousands in our streets*. Nay, scarcely had this PLAGUE devoured us, and consumed the *chief of all our strength*; as our hearts, like *Pharaoh's*, were still hardened; there broke forth a wasteful and destructive FIRE, which desolated and destroyed the CAPITAL of the Kingdom: And had not the same *gracious Goodness* interposed, we should have been *this day as Sodom*, or like unto *Gomorrab*.

When

When our religious rights, and liberties, were in the extremest danger, from the bigotted rashness of a MONARCH blinded with zeal; how wonderfully were we protected by the removal of that evil! our church preserved; our liberty secured; by a new DELIVERER, raised up to BOTH!

Lastly, When our restless and ambitious enemies have twice endeavoured to deprive us of all our enjoyments and possessions; That their designs were defeated, their attempts frustrated, is to be ascribed to the same *divine Providence*: Nor can we with any gratitude omit our late amazing preservation, in that dreadful CALAMITY, which was so fatal in other Countries, and so little felt in our own.

Let not any of us, therefore, be afraid, under our *present Calamities*; but hope rather, and comfort ourselves, that they may be profitable to us. If He, who is *the same yesterday, to day, and for ever*, saved our Forefathers; we trust also, that
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He will *have mercy upon us, and will save us.*

As we desire also not to feel any greater or more severe chastisement, than we labour under at present, from either our avowed, or our secret Enemies; and from various other, either impending or home-felt calamities; and would have every fore evil be done away, or removed from us; — let us now instantly, not only resolve to grow better in our lives and conversations, but from this moment, *break off our sins, by righteousness, and our iniquities, by shewing mercy to the POOR.*

But this I think, has been already begun in almost every parish in the Kingdom; we daily hear of the goodness of several well-disposed Christians to their brethren in distress. For the relief of the Necessitous of this County especially, there is a SUBSCRIPTION entered into, which reflects Honour on its promoters and encouragers, proving their hearts, to be *neither hardened, nor their faces set against the POOR.*

May

May it continue to increase, and abound among us, and, like its *parent Charity*, never fail! For by such means, we shew the greatest Prudence, and thus effectually *make* unto ourselves *Friends, of the mammon of unrighteousness*: And if we have *sown bountifully, we shall reap also bountifully*; and *the Lord will deliver us, in the time of trouble*.

Now, if we look back again upon ourselves in a more extensive view, connected with all our Brethren; — What else, but Works of this sort, have hitherto saved us, or delayed our RUIN? What besides, hath stopped the wrath of God from falling too heavily upon us? or his sore Judgements, which we have often felt, and do still feel, from destroying us utterly? They indeed, we must with sorrow and shame confess to be justly due to our Wickedness, and Immoralities; to the manifold Sins of this Nation: But we may still trust, whatever Visitations it feeleth at present, or may hereafter suffer, that they are the kind Correc-

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tions of a merciful, indulgent Father; sent on purpose, for our Amendment; that we may be *cleansed from our Sins*; that *Iniquity be not our ruin*.

How far such gracious designs of Providence, have been hitherto, properly answered by us, God alone knoweth; but it is evident to every one, that we are still most flagrantly wicked; and *there is none that doth good; no, not one*. Where then is Boasting? or what grounds have we for pride or presumption? If we have any of us endeavoured to do Good, or have done it; though the little we have done may be matter of Joy *to us*, yet it is no just cause of glorying before God; in *whose Sight no man living can be justified*. Far be it therefore from any of us, to boast by ostentatiously doing our Alms before Men, that *they may see our good works*; but rather, as we are commanded, let us do all, *to the Glory of God*; whose Fellow-workers we are in every charitable undertaking towards all men; especially towards them of the
House-

Household of Faith: By such a practice, if we do not bring down every blessing upon us, we shall yet use the best means to prevent future evils, complying virtually with the PROPHET's exhortation, *in turning to the Lord our God, with all our Heart, if haply He may become jealous for his Land, and pity his PEOPLE.*

F I N I S.

Humblest of Kings: By such a practice, if
we do not bring down every blessing upon
us, we shall yet use the best means to pre-
vent future evils, complying virtually with
the Patriarch's exhortation, in turning to
the Lord our God, with all our Heart, if
happily He may become gracious for his Lord,
and give his People.

